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Advertising: Cigarette Controversy Widens

By PETER BART

More heat will be added to the simmering controversy over cigarette advertising as a result of the publication yesterday of a provocative new book about smoking.

The book, "The Consumers Union Report on Smoking and the Public Interest," was published by the Consumers Union and distributed by Simon & Schuster, Inc. It advocates a vigorous Government program to regulate cigarette advertising and inform the public about the alleged hazards connected with smoking.

After reviewing medical findings on smoking, the book concludes that the evidence "is surely sufficient to persuade rational men and women that they would be better off not smoking—that they would, on the average, both live longer and stay healthier while they lived."

The tobacco industry vigorously disputes these conclusions.

Political Repercussions

In view of the alleged health hazard, the book notes that "the most direct approach to the problem of cigarette advertising would be to ban it altogether." Italy banned tobacco advertising a year ago, the book notes, but since tobacco is a Government monopoly in Italy the commercial protests were minimal. In the United States, the political repercussions of a direct ban on all tobacco advertising probably would be incendiary, it states.

In view of this fact, the book proposes instead some preliminary moves. Federal agencies, it says, should rule more strictly on advertising claims, particularly those involving mildness and tar and nicotine content. The Federal Communications Commission should rule on whether "radio and TV licensees that carry cigarette commercials are indeed acting in the public interest."

The book also proposes that the Government define what types of advertising may be construed to be aimed specifically at young people, and restrict ads of this sort.

On a much broader scale, the Consumers Union book urges the initiation of a massive "national health program" that would inform the public about the supposed health hazards connected with smoking. Such a program might follow the lead of similar actions taken in Denmark, Britain and several other countries, the book states.

Philip Morris Decision

Publication of the Consumers Union book follows the recent announcement by the Tobacco Institute of a series of voluntary restrictions of cigarette advertising. The institute recently released a series of "suggestions" to member companies urging them to avoid sponsorship of TV programs aimed at a youghful audience and to stop using "youthful-looking" models in their ads.

The institute also said that several member companies had agreed to halt all advertising in college media and to disband their networks of college representatives.

There had been considerable speculation about whether the institute, in announcing its "suggestions," was speaking for the entire cigarette industry or just part of it.

This speculation was further heightened yesterday by the disclosure that Philip Morris, Inc., had decided to continue buying space in college papers for its Max Shulman humor column.

Though the Shulman column contains considerable editorial material, it also embraces some plugs for Philip Morris products — particularly Marlboro cigarettes. The column runs in more than 350 college newspapers as a paid ad.

While continuing the Shulman column, Philip Morris will not buy ordinary display advertising nor use campus representatives. The company has not used campus representation nor bought display ads for some time.

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